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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HONG KONG 001691

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/CM
NSC FOR DENNIS WILDER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#) [HK](#)
SUBJECT: U.S.-CHINA COMMISSION VISIT TO HONG KONG:
PRO-DEMOCRACY LEADERS

REF: HONG KONG 01689

Classified By: Acting DPO Laurent Charbonnet; Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Summary: During April 29-30 meetings in Hong Kong, Civic Party legislator and March 2007 candidate for Chief Executive Alan Leong told a visiting delegation of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) that his campaign had laid the groundwork for the Hong Kong people to "have a free election next time." Leong said the "challenges ahead" for the pan-democrats included consolidation of their achievements and attainment of universal suffrage as soon as possible, although he believed Beijing had been sending "messages" that 2012 was too early for universal suffrage. In another meeting, several pan-democratic Legislative Council (Legco) members told the delegation that the general political situation in Hong Kong was "getting worse," with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) gaining a tighter hold on the media and opinion polls while the "conservatives" worked to limit progress toward universal suffrage. Democratic Party Legco member Martin Lee believed the impetus for this obstructionism came from Beijing, which had been leery of the pan-democrats since the Article 23 (national security legislation) fiasco of 2003. In an April 30 dinner meeting with several democracy and human rights activists, Confederation of Trade Unions leader and Legco member Lee Cheuk-yan said central government attitudes and policies toward the HKSAR provided a useful indicator of Beijing's domestic policies; if they did not allow progress toward democratization in Hong Kong, then they certainly would not do so in the mainland. Lee and others in the group were pessimistic about the planned mid-summer publication of recommendations for political reform by the government-appointed Commission for Strategic Development (CSD). End Summary.

Alan Leong

12. (C) On April 30, Civic Party legislator Alan Leong, the pan-democratic candidate for Chief Executive who was defeated by incumbent CE Donald Tsang in March, told the visiting USCC delegation that he had achieved "what he set out to do." He said he was "not in the race to get the job," because he knew the system was "rigged," but rather wanted to lay the groundwork for the Hong Kong people to "have a free election next time." Leong gave credit to Tsang, whom he said easily could have declined to participate in the two pre-election public debates. Leong said his candidacy had "benchmarked a minimum" for what the Hong Kong people expect from the CE election, including televised debates and articulation of platforms. Leong said post-election polls showed that 70-80 percent of the people held positive views of his

participation in the process.

13. (C) Leong said the "challenges ahead" for the pan-democrats included consolidation of their achievements and attainment of universal suffrage as soon as possible. For the next scheduled CE election in 2012, Leong said Beijing had been sending "messages" that 2012 was too early for universal suffrage, and he believed the central government would continue to employ its "old tactics" to stall the process. He believed CE Tsang would continue to prefer to "keep the status quo rather than rock the boat. Both the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) and its pro-Beijing supporters wanted to "reform" the electoral system in ways that would "screen out" pro-democracy candidates; for example, Leong cited a recent suggestion by Basic Law Institute Chairman Alan Hoo to preserve the 800-member Chief Executive Election Commission, but lower the nomination threshold from 100 to 50; the top two vote-getters then would compete in a "universal suffrage" election. What was more "shocking," he said, was that this was proposed as a permanent rather than interim measure. As a result, the pan-democrats needed to "fight on" and engage in more policy research and public outreach to convince the people that they constituted a genuine alternative or "government in waiting." This, he said, would be difficult while the economy remained strong.

14. (C) In response to Commissioner Houston's observation that Hong Kong people increasingly identified themselves as "Chinese" rather than Hong Kong nationals, Leong replied that this was not unexpected. Nevertheless, he pointed out that Hong Kong young people had been highly interested in his CE election campaign, with his personal blog consistently drawing the highest number of hits during February and March.

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Furthermore, Leong believed Hong Kong's professional and middle classes had become increasingly frustrated with the government's failure to engage in "civic activism." For example, he cited a poll by Baptist University Professor Michael DeGolyer which found that all sectors of society believed the policy-making process in Hong Kong was "unfair;" more striking, civil servants registered the highest such rating. Similarly, Leong said that his candidacy's dominance in seven Election Committee subsectors, including higher education, lawyers, and engineers, in the December 2006 EC vote, which was designed to encourage voters to place the parochial interests of their subsectors ahead of those of Hong Kong, generated even more anxiety in Beijing.

15. (C) Since the election, Leong said he had not observed any retaliation by the central government against him. On the contrary, he believed Beijing was "handling me with a lot of care." One consequence of his candidacy, however, was that the various "report writers" or "middlemen" from Beijing who used to visit him had stopped doing so since he announced his candidacy; he believed this was because they did not want to be seen as interfering in any way with his candidacy.

16. (C) Asked by Commissioner D'Amato whether Hong Kong's influence on Beijing was increasing, and if so whether that was a concern in Beijing, Leong noted that the two televised CE debates in March had been viewed by some 2.5 million Hong Kong viewers as well as "all of Guangdong Province" in southern China. He believed that mainland officials could have blocked the broadcasts if they had wanted, as they did for a live CNN interview of him in March. Leong hoped the Guangdong viewers had been "inspired" by the debates.

Dinner with Legco Democrats

17. (C) During an April 29 dinner meeting, the delegation reviewed recent political developments with Legislative Council (Legco) members Martin Lee (Democratic Party), Ronny Tong (Civic Party), Kwok Ka-Ki (independent democrat), and

Sin Chung-kai (Democratic Party). According to Kwok, the general political situation in Hong Kong was "getting worse," and Lee noted that there still was no timetable for implementation of universal suffrage. Tong observed that the HKSARG was gaining a tighter hold on the media and opinion polls, while the "conservatives" were pushing to increase the threshold for nomination of a candidate to run for CE. Kwok agreed, saying that the Government "keeps raising the bar and creating hurdles" for the democrats. Lee believed the impetus for this obstructionism came from Beijing, which had been leery of the pan-democrats since the Article 23 (national security legislation) fiasco of 2003. Lee believed the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) was acting "behind the scenes" to control the political reform process. He said Beijing had believed it could win over Hong Kong in the first ten years following reversion, but the huge demonstration in 2003 had caused the central government to alter its plans and only allow CE candidates that it found acceptable. According to Lee, another problem for the pan-democrats was that CE Tsang was "much cleverer" than his predecessor, Tung Chee-hwa.

Dinner with Human Rights Activists

18. (C) During an April 30 dinner meeting, the delegation discussed various Hong Kong and mainland human rights and labor issues with Legco member Lee Cheuk-yan of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, Han Dong-fang and Robin Munro of the China Labour Bulletin (CLB), Cyd Ho of Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, and Amy Gadsden of the International Republican Institute. Han and Munro described CLB's programs to provide legal assistance and promote the rule of law in mainland China. Han said that by locating and hiring lawyers to assist workers and farmers, they were "trying to make people believe more in law," which he said was difficult when the government was the "biggest law-breaker." In the long term, however, Han hoped that respect for the law would grow. While Han claimed that none of the lawyers employed by CLB had "gotten into trouble" through this work, Gadsden noted that more generally the operating environment for NGOs in the mainland was becoming more difficult. She believed the "tremendous progress" in raising consciousness of human rights now "scares Beijing." Lee agreed that "low-level harassment" of NGOs was increasing. Munro said the "wei quan" (rights protection) movement had made tremendous progress but still "could be squashed." He believed that the

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majority of mainlanders had signed on to the post-Tiananmen Square "Deng Xiao-ping New Deal," under which the government enacted economic reforms to improve the livelihoods of the masses in tacit exchange for their acquiescence to continued political control; if the economy slowed, however, Munro said there would be "big trouble."

19. (C) Lee described Hong Kong as "the only place where China could experiment with democracy." As such, central government attitudes and policies toward the HKSAR provided a useful indicator of Beijing's domestic policies; if they did not allow progress toward democratization in Hong Kong, then they certainly would not do so in the mainland. Lee -- who is a member of the government-appointed Commission for Strategic Development (CSD) -- said that although the pan-democrats were "pushing" their electoral reform proposal for inclusion in the forthcoming "green paper," the Government probably would not include it among the three major plans that the publication would highlight. Instead, the CSD would "bundle" all of the dozens of plans reviewed by the CSD into three fairly general plans, call for public consultations and comments, and finally "pull the real plan out" for presentation as the "ultimate" solution. Lee believed the CSD had been "hand-picked to avoid consensus." He agreed, saying the Government would "replay the 2005 scenario" by first proposing a plan that would fall short of the democrats' needs, then portraying them as

"obstructionist" when they refused to support it. She said the government needed to offer a definite timetable for implementation of full universal suffrage; otherwise, the pan-democrats would not agree to a "first step" because they would fear that the "second and third steps" never would follow.

¶10. (SBU) The USCC delegation cleared this cable.
Cunningham